

ALEXANDRE

Missing Mountain

by Lisa Sanditz

First there is a mountain, then there is no mountain, then there is.

—Donovan

In the summer of 2023, on my daily drive home through the Hudson Valley, I was shocked by what I didn't see that day. When I looked west at the familiar, sturdy and handsome Catskill Mountains, quite surprisingly, they were not there. There are logical reasons for the obscured view—snow, fog, rain, nightfall—but it was a bright sunny day. It didn't take long to learn that it was the first time Canadian wildfires had followed trade winds into East Coast airspace. The sky was so dense with particulates that the mountains were missing. This summer, we find ourselves here again.

In these unpredictable times, at least the elements remain reliable. But on this day, even a mountain disappeared. I have recently made a body of landscape paintings that visually explores this disruption by playing around with the colors, patterns and saturation levels in the paintings, to partially obscure this view. The paintings derive their palettes and moods from various viewing conditions: pollutant haze, dazzling night skies, summer heat, the eclipse, snow, etc.

In *Missing Mountain (Stewart's Sherbet Sun)*, a young boy looks longingly at an ice cream cone which is quickly melting in the elevated summer heat. The vibrant orange scoop also doubles as the setting sun while the angry cloud in the sky conjures a thunderstorm, fire, smog and a Frederick Church painting all at once. The outsized boy blocks the mountain, though his raised knee replaces the formation.

The kids these days are constantly faced with reminders of climate change tainting even simple pleasures. Somehow, there is still plenty of pleasure to go around.

Other paintings and works on paper explore the notion of missing, longing, ephemerality and surprise. The painting *Big Foot* depicts colossal teenage feet, standing at the ocean's edge. In *Anticipating the Inevitable Arrival of Various Storms in Cat Cove*, diminutive parents and a gigantic child meet by the sea while an oceanic storm gathers strength off-shore. *Wild Violets* depicts a lively group of women romping through the spring forest. The violets exist as pulses of color. The women parade in an inverted pathway, as their place in the forest is much less rooted than the trees and foliage occupying the forest floor. *Debris Flow* considers the complex relationship between forest fires, mudslides, and California dreaming.

The Green Woman (and The Green Man/Forsythia) reinterprets the British folktale of The Green Man. Throughout the UK, it is common to spot a leaf-clad man carved into cathedral stonework and painted onto pub signs. He is a symbol of ecological protection, and a sly reminder of our pagan past. In these new paintings, The Green Woman embodies the role as a new symbolic protector and the diminutive Green Man can be seen lackadaisically fading into the background.

Alongside the paintings, I am working on site and in my studio on native and introduced plants, with a focus on native spring ephemeral flowers. Chasing this group of blooms during their fleeting emergence in the early spring is a hope-filled task. Their beauty and vital role in a healthy ecosystem are endlessly inspiring. But you have to catch them quickly, before they go missing.